



## **Texas House Committee on Higher Education**

### ***Houston Community College Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic Questions Presented***

September 1, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Committee on Higher Education with information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Houston Community College (“HCC”) responses to the questions presented are available immediately below.

#### **Question Presented #1:**

*Are institutions of higher education ensuring the health and safety of students, faculty and staff during the 2020 Fall semester? When applicable, please speak directly to classroom and lab setting, dormitories and dining halls.*

#### **Response #1:**

HCC is taking extraordinary measures to ensure the health and safety of students, faculty and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester. HCC follows the guidance from federal, state, and local officials and followed a detailed reopening checklist that specifies actions being taken to implement the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Recommended Health Protocols for Institutions of Higher Education – Fall 2020. HCC is implementing all of the applicable recommended protocols. Some of the protocols include:

- Limiting the number of individuals assigned to buildings and rooms to allow for recommended physical distancing.
- Using [four learning modalities](#) to reduce classroom occupancy. These learning modalities include:
  - Flex Campus: Students enroll in classes and have the choice to attend either online or in person at the scheduled dates and times. We are working on a system to ensure all students have the opportunity to participate in person at times if they want. When a student isn’t attending in person, they are required to participate at the scheduled time online.
  - Lab Based Courses: We will continue to offer our skills-based, hands-on lab courses but with smaller section sizes to enable social distancing. We have added additional lab sections to the schedule to make up for the smaller sizes.

- Online Anytime: Students take classes online at any time. These are traditional online classes and students never come to campus.
- Online on a Schedule: Students take classes online at the scheduled class time that they select when enrolling. Students never come to campus, but log into their class on the scheduled dates and times.
- Requiring training for all faculty, staff and students on appropriate cleaning, disinfection, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- Reducing the amount of in-person instruction when local infections require increased physical distancing. The Flex Campus and Lab Based Courses models are designed to quickly adjust the mix of online vs. in person instruction.
- Offering flexibility to vulnerable students, faculty, and staff populations to minimize their exposure to COVID-19 on campus including the provision of online instruction, provision of student services remotely, and the implementation of remote work strategies.

HCC provides screening for all students, faculty, staff, and visitors. Additional provisions include:

- Modifying facilities to support social distancing including the closing of water fountains and break rooms, increasing spacing between work stations/desks/common area furniture, and restricting building entrances and exits.
- Adding physical dividers in high traffic areas.
- Requiring all persons on campus to wear a mask consistent with executive orders and the provision of face coverings to anyone arriving without one.

HCC is a federation of commuter schools and does not have residence halls or dining halls.

## **Question Presented #2:**

*What plans are in place for on-campus COVID-19 testing? Do institutions have the capacity to provide testing on campus, both in terms of available supplies and labs to process tests?*

## **Response #2:**

HCC is not mandating COVID-19 testing for employees, students, or visitors prior to a return to campus. As an urban community college with no on campus housing, COVID-19 testing as a requirement to come onto campus or as a general surveillance methodology is impractical and of limited benefit.

Community wide disease surveillance, mitigation, testing, and contact tracing efforts include all members of the HCC community. HCC continues to work closely with Harris County and the City of Houston to make college locations available for use as COVID-19 testing sites. Currently, four campuses are hosting free COVID-19 testing. The exact testing locations may change based upon the community needs as assessed by either the Houston Health Department or Harris County Public Health. Testing supplies and lab availability are managed by the respective health departments and testing agency partners.

**Question Presented #3:**

*If applicable, what are plans for collegiate athletes this Fall? How will student athletes be kept safe? If fans will be permitted to attend events, how will fans be kept safe?*

**Response: #3**

HCC does not have a collegiate athletic program.

**Question Presented #4**

*What do projected enrollment figures and formula funding look like to institutions for this school year?*

**Response #4:**

At this writing, relative to the start of Fall 2020 classes – compared to last year this time, HCC's semester credit hour enrollment will be down approximately 20% at the end of term. For regular term (non-dual credit), HCC's enrollment rate is at 85-90%, as compared to last year. Our continuing education enrollment (down by over 50%), and credit programs requiring face-face instruction are more greatly impacted, particularly due to the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in state and local mandated school closures.

The dual credit enrollment rate for Fall 2020 is currently 50%, as compared to last year this time. Depending on ISDs' plans, an upward trend may be possible, although currently online delivery is adversely impacting dual credit enrollment. By way of observation, we identify the lack of access to technology (e.g., computers, Internet, and Wi-Fi) being a limiting factor for the student demographic that is central to our mission. Effectively, this student population is more likely to experience disruptions in their education pursuits when technology is unavailable as in the instant case.

On a positive note with respect to formula funding, students are averaging more contact hours (as of first day of classes, Fall 2020). At this time last year, they averaged 159.8 contact hours. This year, they are averaging 166.8 on the first day.

**Question Presented #5**

*Has there been a noticeable impact on staff or faculty retention with regard to concerns about the pandemic?*

**Response #5:**

No. There has not been a noticeable impact this year.

### Question Presented #6

*Health Relations Institutions were exempt from the 5% budget cuts earlier this year, due their important role in resolving the public health crisis. What are some of the programs, research, and responses to the pandemic that our Health-Related Institutions have contributed?*

### Response #6:

HCC is not a Health-Related Institution; therefore, the question does not apply.

### Question Presented #7

*How have state and federal COVID-related funds already impacted budgets?*

### Response #7:

Although developing a reliable estimate of the severity of the impact of the pandemic is challenging at this stage, state and federal funds have already impacted the HCC's budget in that HCC has been able to provide **14,918 students emergency financial aid grant funds from the CARES Act** portion for student aid. Additionally, funds received as a minority serving institution have also had a positive impact on HCC's budget. However, unanticipated cost outlays for laptops, facility cleaning, and personal protection equipment ("PPE") are expected to accumulate rapidly as HCC plans materialize for in-person instruction for the Fall 2020 reopening.

Colleges across the state have also experienced significant financial harm as a result of the pandemic. Texas Association of Community Colleges' analysis of the reported data estimates that the community college sector will experience a **financial loss of \$72.2 million in FY 20** as a result of the pandemic, notwithstanding an estimated **\$123 million in projected reimbursements statewide**, and the possibility that institutions are not projecting receipt of their full CARES Act institutional share in the current FY (reported CARES Act institutional share reimbursements are currently far below the official allocation), the actual reimbursement rate may be higher.

New costs related to campus re-opening, as well as the potential for tuition revenues to fall short of expectations, could increase unreimbursed losses heading into the Fall 2020 semester.

### Question Presented #8

*How has the pandemic affected the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges?*

### Response #8:

The question does not apply to HCC.

**Question Presented #9**

*Does your institution have a public, online dashboard for the reporting of positive COVID-19 case which is updated daily? If so, what is the link to the dashboard.*

**Response #9:**

HCC does not have an online dashboard for COVID-19 case updates.